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ABSTRACT

This booklet is intended to help spread the word about the library and the librarian's role. It discusses the three interwoven roles of the school library media specialist--the role of information specialists (the "traditional" role); the role of library-media teachers in which they advance the goals of the school's literacy and general educational programs; and the role of instructional consultants in which they work in concert with classroom teachers to assure that library and research skills are integrated into the content areas rather than taught in isolation. A 7-item list of journal articles on the school library and the role of the library media specialist, and an 11-item list of books and journal articles on teachers and library media specialists working together are attached. (RS)

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Getting to Know the School Library Media Specialist

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"Librarians have long fought the classical stereotype—shushers who protect books. I think one way to counteract this is from the educational programs at teacher colleges. New teachers as well as our veterans do not have an understanding of the library's role or the vast resources available both inhouse and beyond our walls. Some often do not realize that we are also teachers who have taken many of the same courses while also specializing in resources and researching. We need some good PR, but we also should be recognized by those who teach future elementary and secondary level teachers. Teachers unions are starting to publicize achievements by librarians, but accolades are few and far between. Budget handlers are also unaware—primarily because many recall the ivy-covered library with dusty books and funereal quiet. We are not that way any longer. Help!"

This call for help comes from a school library media specialist who responded anonymously to a recent survey that I distributed to teachers, principals, and librarians in elementary schools across the United States. This librarian wants us to better understand her role and what she and the library has to offer. The resource you are reading now is intended to help spread the word about the library and the librarian's role.

One way to understand today's school libraries and media specialists is by becoming acquainted with *Information Power*, a position statement from the professional organizations (American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology) to which school library media specialists belong. Published in 1988, *Information Power* sets forth a clear and comprehensive description of the role of the school library media specialist.

Information Power tells us that the composite role of the library media specialist is made up of three interwoven roles: (1) the information specialist, (2) the teacher, and (3) the instructional consultant. The next section of this resource lists features of each of these three roles. As you read over the features, consider which you currently recognize and use and which you may want to look into as you further get to know the library media specialist with whom you work.

The Role of Information Specialist

It is the role of information specialist that seems most traditional to me—I say "traditional" in the most positive sense. When the librarian is working in the role of information specialist, s/he is doing what librarians have done as long as we have known them. S/he operates the library and its schedule, maintains the collection and helps us take advantage of the full resources of the library. Working in the role of information specialist, the librarian:

- Supports flexible scheduling throughout the school day
- Supports flexible scheduling beyond the school day
- Supports flexible scheduling for small groups and whole classes
- Shares books, resources, and services
- Participates in selecting new materials
- Seeks input from children and colleagues when selecting new materials
- Makes materials from other libraries available
- Actively seeks and promotes funding
- Assists children and colleagues in selecting and locating books
- Assists children and colleagues in locating information

- Assists children in developing systematic modes of inquiry
- Knows needs, skills, interests, and abilities of children
- Applies knowledge about teaching and learning
- Is knowledgeable of range of books and materials for readers
- Supports flexible policies to ensure maximum and equal access
- Uses accurate and efficient systems for locating resources and information

The Role of Library-Media Teacher

The library media specialist quoted earlier certainly had the role of teacher in mind. As she pointed out, school library media specialists are trained as teachers as well as librarians. In this role, they are prepared to work as teachers of children and adults in order to advance the goals of the school's literacy and general educational programs. While in the role of library-media teacher, the librarian:

- Teaches children how to select and locate books, resources, and information
- Teaches colleagues how to select and locate books, resources, and information
- Teaches parents and adults how to select and locate books, resources, and information
- Promotes and supports lifelong reading and learning
- Promotes and supports critical reading and thinking
- Teaches appreciation for freedom of information
- Teaches understanding of and respect for copyright and privacy laws
- Teaches parents and others techniques for reading with children

The Role of Instructional Consultant

It is the role of instructional consultant that allows the library media specialist to work in concert with classroom teachers to assure that library and research skills and strategies are integrated into the content areas rather than taught in isolation. As an instructional consultant, the librarian:

- Participates in designing literacy curriculum and instructional strategies
- Ensures that information skills are integrated into the content areas
- Participates in selecting topics for unit experiences (thematic units, inquiry units, literature units, content area units, etc.)
- Participates in developing unit plans
- Participates in gathering books and other resources for units
- Participates in carrying out unit plans
- Participates in assessing unit experiences
- Participates in assessing reading attitudes, habits, interests, preferences, and so on
- Plans and promotes programs for voluntary reading for individual children and groups of children
- Participates in assessing voluntary reading

All of us who are interested in children, reading instruction, and voluntary reading need to know and use our school libraries well. Now that you have previewed the complex role of today's school library media specialist, take another step. Make an appointment to talk with the media specialist in your school. Discuss features of the librarian's role that you would like to draw upon in your work with children. Ask the library media specialist to help you learn more by sharing some of the literature cited below that tells about the library and how teachers and librarians work together.

Read More About . . .

The School Library and the Role of the Library Media Specialist

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Whitney, K. A. (1988). Information power: An overview—Building library media programs for the future. *School Library Media Quarterly, 17*, 7–10.

Teachers and Library Media Specialists Working Together

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Daniel, T. (1990). Extending literacy with school libraries. *Language Arts, 67*, 746–749.

Goldfarb, L., & Salmon, S. (1993). Enhancing language arts for special populations: Librarians and classroom teachers collaborate. *Language Arts, 70*, 567–572.

Hansen, J. (1987). *When writers read*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hiebert, E. H., Mervar, K. B., & Person, D. (1990). Research directions: Children's selection of tradebooks in libraries and classrooms. *Language Arts, 67*, 758–763.

Hughes, S. M. (1993). The impact of whole language on four elementary school libraries. *Language Arts, 70*, 393–399.

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Templeton, S. (1990). New trends in an historical perspective: Children's librarians and language arts educators. *Language Arts, 67*, 776–779.

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